

**YCCART 2021/Y10**

**Resistivity survey at cropmark site near Woodspring Priory, Kewstoke, North Somerset**

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH TEAM (YCCART)**

*General Editor: Vince Russett*



*Junction of orchard wall with earlier, close to site*

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## **Abstract**

*A limited (1600m<sup>2</sup>) geophysical survey was carried out on an area of supposed cropmarks immediately outside of the orchard at Woodspring Priory. Some results, possibly indicating a further structure relating to the former garden at the Priory were detected. Work in recording wall repairs on the Scheduled Monument helped with relative dating evidence.*

## **Acknowledgements**

A Heritage Lottery Grant enabled the purchase, by YCCCART, of a Geoscan RM 15 resistivity meter without which this survey could not have been undertaken.

This survey would also not have been carried out without the willing permission of the landowner, The National Trust, through Martin Papworth, and the tenants, the Toogood Partnership.

The authors are grateful for the hard work by the members of YCCCART in performing the surveys and Vince Russett for editing.

## **Introduction**

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.

## Site location



*Fig 1: Location of survey*

Woodspring Priory is a former Victorine (Augustinian) priory beside the Severn estuary in the parish of Kewstoke, about 3 miles (5km) north-east of Weston-super-Mare, in North Somerset. The centre of the complex lies at ST34346614. The survey area (above) lies at ST3447966237, immediately to the east of the Scheduled area of the monument.

### **Land use and geology**

Woodspring Priory is currently a grazing farm, specialising in sheep rearing. The old farmhouse at the site is a Landmark Trust property, let for short periods, and not open to the public. The rest of the area is in the possession of the National Trust. The area is normally open to the public, but the Priory is still closed (December 2021) due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

The property is entirely constructed on the local Blue Lias, some of which is incorporated in the postmedieval structures at the site, and which outcrops in the bottom of the engineered course of the Sand Rhyne, at the entrance to the site (YCCART 2018).

## Historical & archaeological context

Woodspring Priory is, and always has been, a somewhat remote site, most easily reachable by water through the Woodspring Pill, which lidar and air photographic evidence shows once reached the edge of the priory property, beside the modern road bridge.

The site features a number of standing medieval buildings, including the nave of the church, a structure known as the refectory (although this is clearly the former infirmary), and the ruins of other buildings, such as part of the cloister and the entrance gate. Fragments and indications of other buildings survive in arches and old stairs in the walls of surviving buildings. Outside of the precinct that is open to the public is a great medieval barn (although its roof is 20<sup>th</sup> century pastiche after a fire in the 1920s). This is in private use and is not available for public visits.

In the outer precinct, what appears to be a medieval moated site has been recently recognised. During recent heavy rain, this was very noticeable and water filled (*pers comm* R Cleland)

The whole site (including the site of the infilled fish ponds to the west of the adjacent farm) is Scheduled (SM22847); several structures are also Listed:

Priory Church	LBI
Gatehouse, gates etc	LBI
East cloister wall ( <i>recte</i> West)	LBI
West wall of chapter house	LBI
Infirmary	LBI
Barn and well	LBI
Farmhouse range	LBII*

Surprisingly little reported archaeological work has been carried out at Woodspring Priory.

An excavation is recorded in the 1885 Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (Paull, R. W. 1885) as follows:-

*'..excavations commenced in Sept., and continued to the previous Saturday, the foundations of the walls of the choir had been laid bare. Where the high altar had stood, was found a quantity of 14<sup>th</sup> century pavement, and among the armorial tiles were the arms of England, France, the Isle of Man (with roses between each leg), lion rampant, a portion of the arms of Clare, and fragments. Ten feet from the east wall was found a large hole, containing human remains, including skulls; and four feet beneath the surface, near the tower, were found slabs, which appeared to have formed the end of a vault. Leaden coffins had been found:*

*Large pieces of tracery and finials, evidently portions of the choir windows, were also unearthed.; also glazed tiles and some large white squares, either of very fine freestone, or marble. From the position of these relics, it would appear that the pavement of the west end was more plain than at the east, where the more elaborate remains were found.*

*The total length of the chancel was 43 ft. 5 in., and the width 19 ft. 10 in, the side walls being 3 ft. in thickness..'*

In the early 1970s an excavation by Tomalin and Crook resulted in a guidebook (Tomalin 1974; Tomalin & Crook 2007), but no substantial excavation report would seem to have been published.

An unpublished geophysical survey was carried out to the south of the infirmary and to the east end of the church in the early 1990s (GBP Prospection 1998) in conjunction with Bristol University. This has not been published, although there is a copy in the North Somerset HER: its results, while not as detailed as the below, helps to support the basic accuracy of YCCCARTs work at the site.

Substantial (and somewhat repetitive) antiquarian study of the sparse medieval documentary evidence for the priory has been published, but it does not appear that the national archives have been trawled in detail, a process which, for example, Prosser (1996) employed to great effect in his PhD thesis on Keynsham Abbey (B&NES). A recent earthwork study in the orchard is in the North Somerset HER (Henderson 2012; NSHER 2012-156): it identified previously unrecorded earthworks, while a walkover survey in December 2011 identified a previously unrecognised moated site in the outer precinct, from which a collection of high-status 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery was recovered (YCCCART 2018).

These all tell roughly the same story, of a fairly wealthy Domesday manor replaced in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, around 1214, when the Victorines (a branch of the Augustinians) arrived from a former site called *Doddelynych* (whose site is currently unknown). The priory never had more than a handful of occupants and a meagre land-owning, mostly in the surrounding countryside. This priory was closed at the reformation, with subsequent land owners carrying out work to demolish the chancel of the church and various other demolitions and buildings.

The original place-name, Worspring, clearly derives from 'Worle' + OE '*spring*' (coppice growth), the whole meaning 'coppice wood attached to Worle', and indeed, coppice wood is mentioned in its Domesday entry.

One aspect of Woodspring's history is surprisingly, only mentioned by a local historian. F A Knight, who in 'The Seaboard of Mendip' refers to payments by several local parishes to a 'hospital for maimed soldiers' apparently at the site for over a century in the post-medieval period. Woodspring is specifically mentioned as the site of this hospital in the parish records of Kewstoke in 1722 and 1725 (Knight 1902: 193).

The earliest map of the site (1768; in private hands) shows buildings that are no longer extant (See Fig 2 below).

An excellent guide book has been produced (Tomalin D & Crook C, 2007) and further information can be found on line at

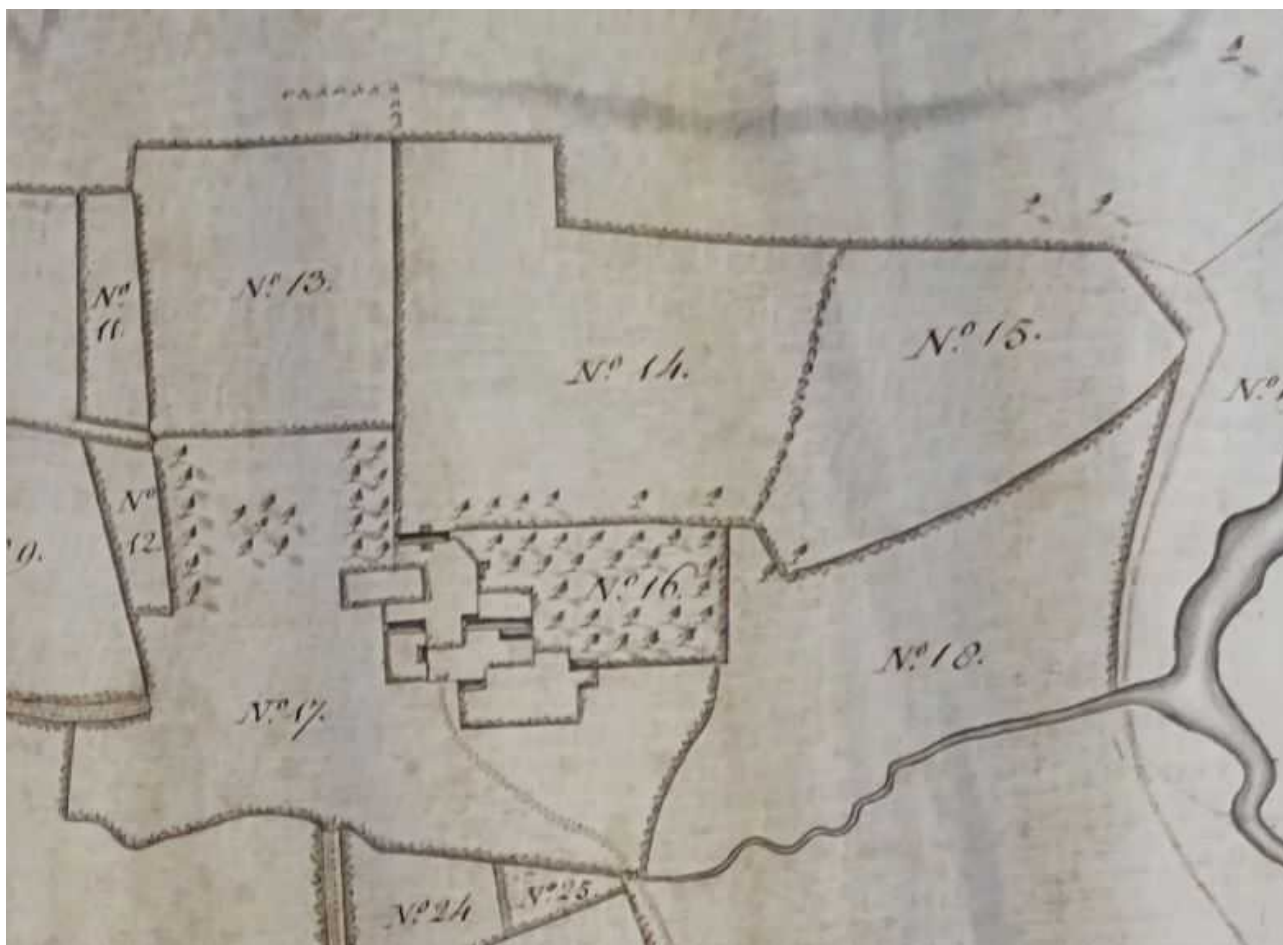


Fig 2: 1768 map of Woodspring Priory. Courtesy of Mr D Ridley. A copy of a second version of this map in the museum at Woodspring Priory has an illustration of the main buildings standing at that time.

The walls around the precinct (apart from that around the orchard) have all been slightly altered in plan: this plan also shows a building (to the west of the farmhouse) that corresponds exactly with a building standing in the farm buildings today. Although it today has a 19<sup>th</sup> century roof, the walls could well be early post-medieval or even monastic in origin: it certainly shares the same axis as the other buildings at the site.

The local field boundaries changed between 1768 and the Tithe Map of 1840 (see below).

In 1768, the field names were:

14	The Forty Acres
15	Rams Close
16	The house, orchard etc.
18	Ox Warth



Fig 3: The site in 1840

In this case, the field names were now:

5	Rams Close
6	Ox Warth
10	Orchard
12	The Forty Acres
13	Garden

This presumably implies change of use from pasture to cultivation in the intervening years at the survey site.

The place-name 'warth' *OE* 'waroþ' meaning 'raised area of land adjacent to a watercourse' is a common local place-name, and is still understood in the agricultural community. It is, of course, cognate with 'wharf' (a landing place for cargo from boats).

The occasion for the realignment of field boundaries is unknown.



## **Survey objectives**

This survey was targeted precisely at an area where cropmarks were claimed by Tomalin and Crook (2007) (see below), outside of, and to the east of, the Scheduled area of the monument. They suggested this might be the site of Five Elms, where former findings of bones and carved stones had been found. The site was initially carpeted with a thick cover of thistles, whose removal delayed the commencement of works.

## **Methodology**

The survey of the fields was undertaken during the period July to September 2021 by teams from YCCCART using a Geoscan RM-15 resistivity meter.

The completed survey was downloaded to TerraSurveyor, and the resultant composite adjusted using the following filters:

## **Resistivity**

Band weight equaliser  
Grad shade  
Despiked  
Clip SD2  
High Pass filter.

The report was written in Libre Office 5 Writer.

Photographs were taken by members of YCCCART, and remain the copyright of YCCCART.

## Results

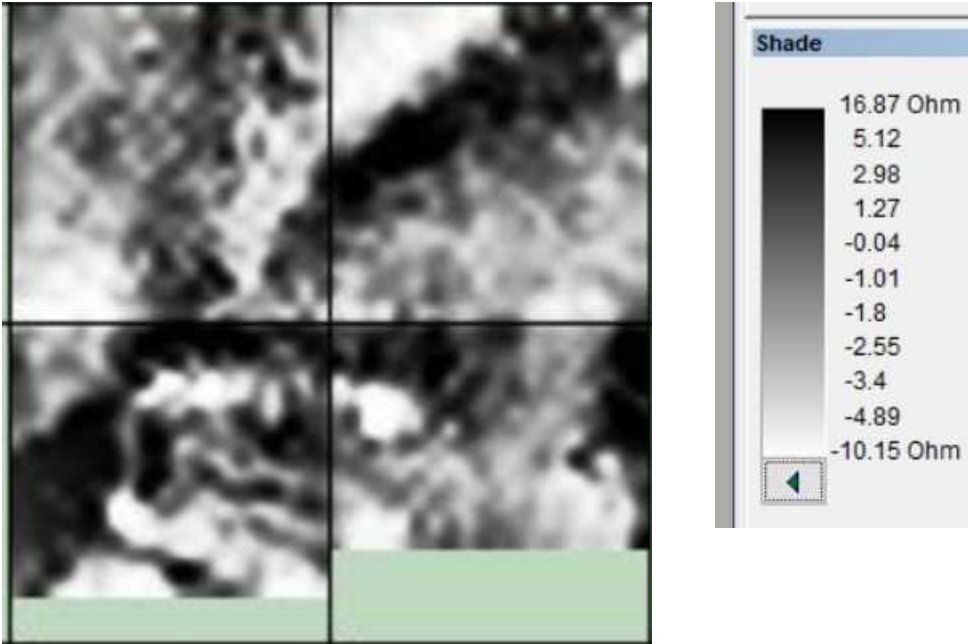


Fig 4: Geophysical survey results

These grids were surveyed to assess claims of crop marks recorded at the site by Tomalin and Crook (below), which they rather surprisingly suggested might be the site of 'Five Elms' where antiquarian accounts located a find spot of possible human burials.

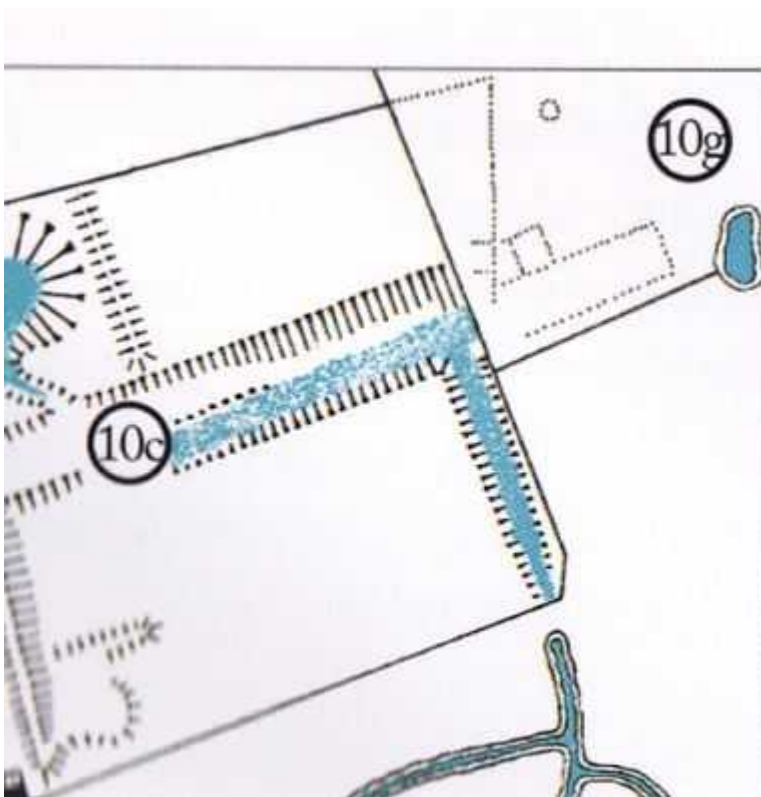


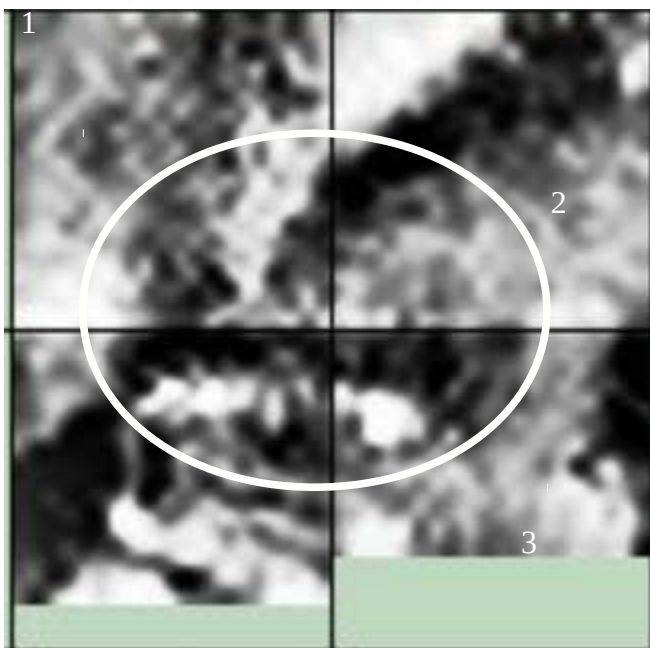
Fig 5: suggested crop marks at site (from Tomalin & Crook 2007)

It has not proved possible to track down the original air photograph cited by Tomalin & Crook, and no photograph available in the North Somerset HER, or on on-line sites such as Britain from above, show these crop marks.

Tomalin & Crooks sketch also shows the wall projecting from the orchard in this area as perpendicular to the orchard wall, which it clearly is not (see Fig 3

above, for example).

While there are some hints of structures (see Fig 6 below) which may correspond to the crop marks recorded, there are some notable differences as well.



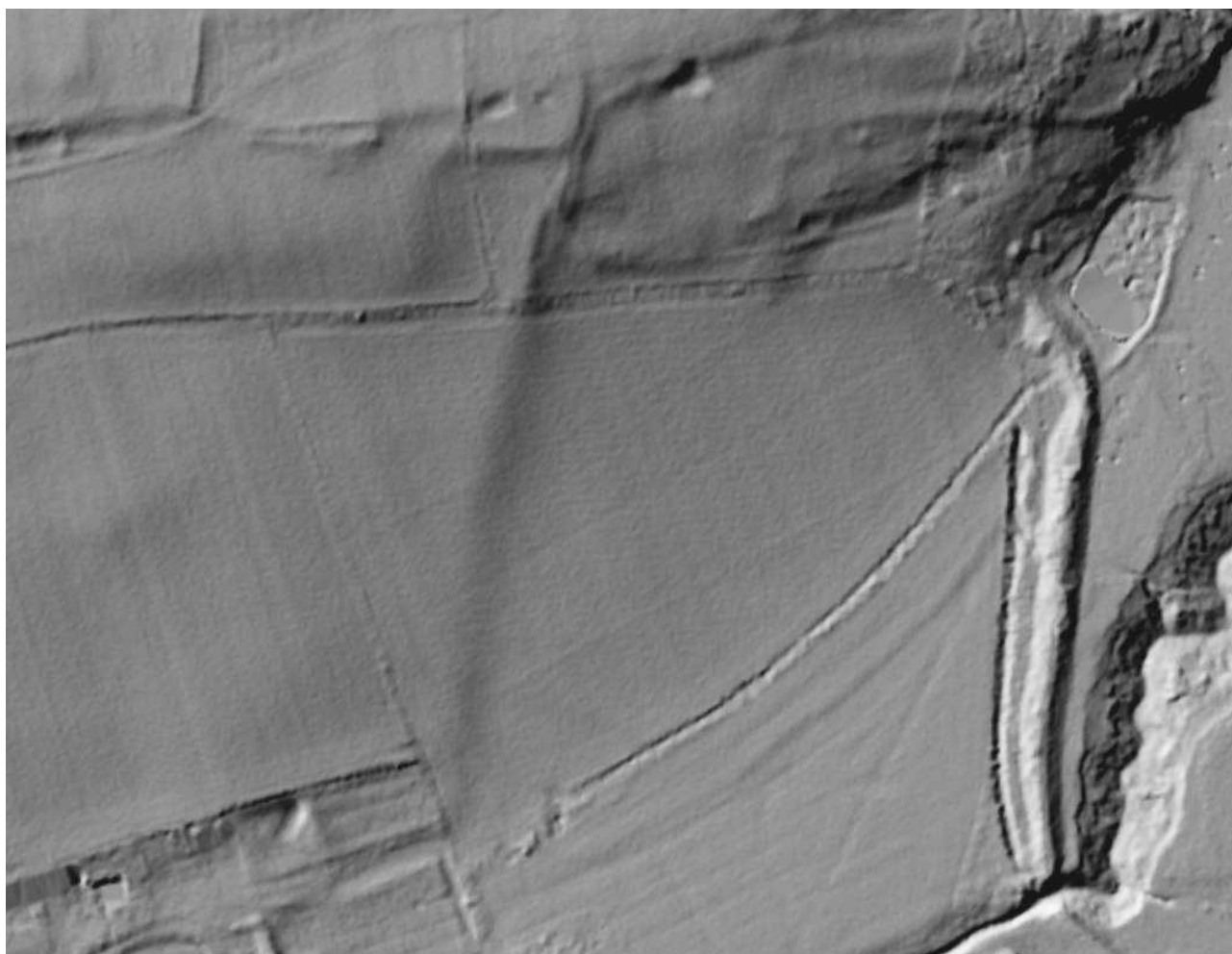
*Fig 6: Interpretation*

Feature 1 is the base of a lynchet which runs up the field to its northern boundary today, visible on lidar (see Fig 7).

Feature 2 is likely the infrastructure for the construction of the adjacent pond (see Fig 3 above).

The results in ellipse 3 are more interesting, and may be structural. A belt of high resistance (some 2-3m wide, and about 20m in length) in the northern part of the two southern grids seems to have possible returns at each end.

*Fig 7: lidar scan of field (illuminated from NW) showing lynchet (Opengov data)*



The lychet in Fig 7 broadly aligns with the 1768 field boundaries as mapped, but presumably is part of the recorded field system on the top of Sand Hill, which is usually assumed to be late prehistoric in date.

Some possible internal features can also be seen in ellipse 3. The degree of interference due to cultivation activity in the 19th century, and the continued use of the area for circular sheep feeders in the 21st, is not clear on current evidence.

The wall around the orchard has produced consistent evidence of use of one specific mortar for the whole construction, an ochreous looking material (5YR 7/3), with specks (and no more) of lime, broadly consistent with an early post-medieval date. It is instructive to note that the orchard wall butts up against the wall on the south side of the survey area, and so should be later (see cover illustration).

## Recommendations for further work

At present, none further, although it should be remembered that this site, while outside of the Scheduled area, also has high archaeological potential.

## References

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YCCART 2012	<i>Gradiometry and Resistivity Surveys at Woodspring Priory</i> ( <a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Woodspring%20report%20final%20v2.pdf">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Woodspring%20report%20final%20v2.pdf</a> )
YCCART 2014	<i>Manual surveys using an electronic, hydrostatic level (NIVCOMP) at Woodspring Priory</i> ( <a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/FRED%20Wspring%20Final%20ed%20v%20070415.pdf">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/FRED%20Wspring%20Final%20ed%20v%20070415.pdf</a> )
YCCART 2018	<i>A Woodspring Priory miscellany</i> ( <a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Miscellany%20Woodspring%20Priory%20%202018-Y6%20%20ver3.pdf">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Miscellany%20Woodspring%20Priory%20%202018-Y6%20%20ver3.pdf</a> )
YCCART 2020a	<i>Observations on wall repairs at Woodspring Priory</i> ( <a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Watching%20Brief%20on%20Wall%20Repairs%20Woodspring%20Priory%202020-Y8%20v2.pdf">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Watching%20Brief%20on%20Wall%20Repairs%20Woodspring%20Priory%202020-Y8%20v2.pdf</a> )
YCCART 2020b	<i>Woodspring Priory geophysical survey briefing note</i> ( <a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Briefing%20Note%20Woodspring%20Priory">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke%20Briefing%20Note%20Woodspring%20Priory</a> )

	<i>%202020-Y7%20v1.pdf)</i>
YCCART 2021	<i>Woodspring Priory geophysical survey (second) briefing note (<a href="http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke_RM15_%20Briefing_note_Woodspring_Priory_2021-%20Y1.pdf">http://www.yccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Kewstoke_RM15_%20Briefing_note_Woodspring_Priory_2021-%20Y1.pdf</a>)</i>

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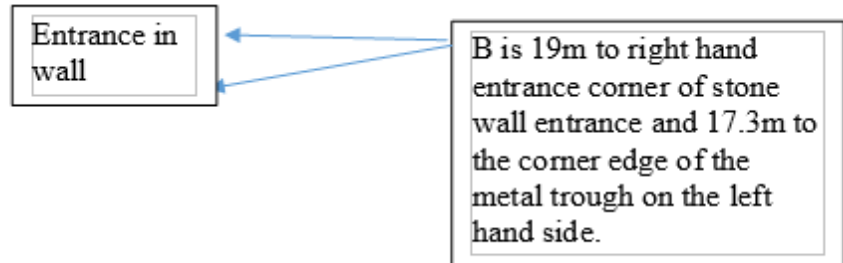
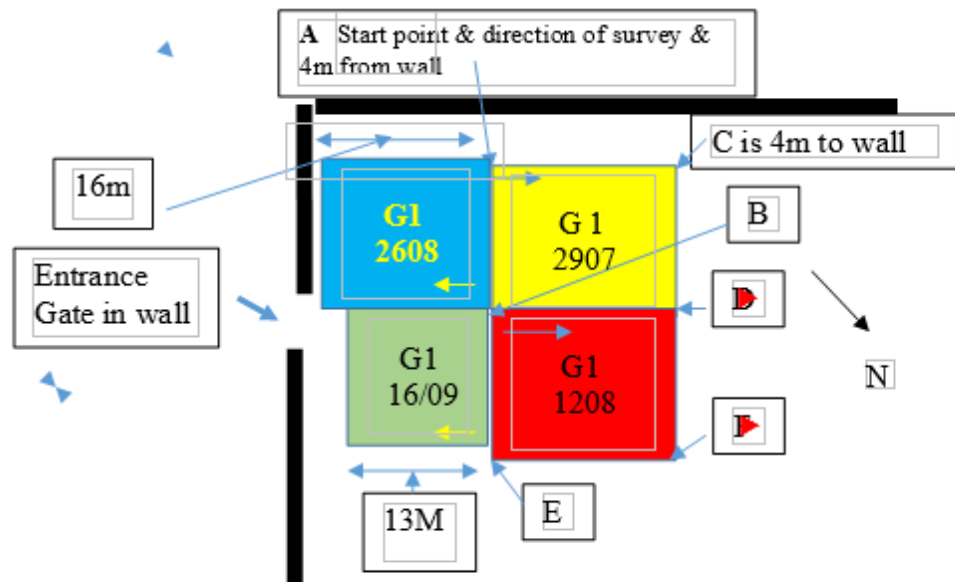
**Date**

2021-12-06

## Appendix: site details

Date	Number of grids	Grid size	Direction of survey
29 July 2021	1	20x20m	North
12 August 2021	1	20x20m	North
26 August 2021	1	20x20m but only 20x16m surveyed	South
16 September 2021	1	20x20m but only 20x13m surveyed	South

## Layout



## GPS

B	334490.7	166242.9
D	334484.2	166261.1
E	334509.7	166247.9
F	334503.2	166267.1